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Showdown at Inc.com

Inc. magazine's editor-in-chief discusses an on-line firestorm sparked by an *Inc. Technology* article. Plus: An introduction to some new *Inc.* contributors.

From: [Inc. Magazine, Jan 2000](#) | **By:** George Gendron

FYI

Mark McNutt, the owner of Krystal Kleen Karpets Kare, was not amused to pick up the June 15, 1999, issue of *Inc. Technology* and find an article by Web-marketing maven Jim Sterne roundly criticizing the home page of Krystal Kleen's Web site. Sterne -- a consultant, the president of Target Marketing of Santa Barbara, in California, and the author of *World Wide Web Marketing* -- was writing about the basics of good Web design, a subject on which he is a leading expert. He used McNutt's home page as a prime example of what not to do.

Sterne's piece was a good one, and his criticisms were appropriate, but McNutt must have sat there thinking, "What the hell did I do to deserve a public lambasting in a national magazine? Hey, I never asked for this attention."

McNutt went on-line to object, responding to Sterne by E-mail and creating a Web page of protest that he linked to his home page. Sterne defended himself, saying he was sorry to have hurt McNutt's feelings, but Web pages are public -- and thus fair game for criticism. Readers got involved, about half of them siding with Sterne, half with McNutt. *Everyone* was angry about the headline we wrote for the article: "[Even a Child Can Do It](#)."

Then Sterne and senior editor Leigh Buchanan came up with a crazy idea: Why not sponsor a contest and see who could produce the best new home-page design for McNutt's company?

In an amazingly short time, we received 57 fully rendered designs of home pages for Krystal Kleen Karpets Kare, submitted by both professional and amateur designers. What's so great about them? For one thing, it's fascinating to see how many ways there are to spin a single set of facts. As Sterne observed in an E-mail message to us, "You start with the same company, the same story, the picture of the Krystal Kleen Karpets Kare van, and you get 57 different versions from 57 different artists."

You also get Sterne's evaluations of the designs. "Nobody got everything right," he wrote us, "thus proving three things: First of all, building Web sites is not child's play. It takes business acumen, marketing savvy,

graphic-arts talent, and a clear understanding of what the customer sees from the other side of the screen. Second, criticizing Web sites is so easy, even a child can do it. That's why we need to be especially diligent when creating them. Finally, we now have proof that we don't have to learn everything by making our own mistakes -- we can learn from the mistakes of others."

By the way, McNutt and Sterne each gave us a list of their top 10 picks, which you can find at the aforementioned Web address. McNutt's favorite design will become his new home page -- gratis.

New Blood

We have two new *Inc.* regulars to introduce this month, both of whom will be helping us explore the burgeoning Internet economy.

Andy Raskin is a former vice-president of Netyear Group, where he brokered Web deals for companies like the New York Times Co. and Sony and launched Japanese editions of Jupiter Communications' research publications. He's also a first-rate writer, having penned articles for publications as diverse as *Inc. Technology*, *Coffee Journal*, and *Playboy*. So when he decided to abandon his life as a New York salaryman for the wild world of Silicon Valley start-ups, we asked him to chronicle his odyssey. In the first installment, Raskin tells of the inspiration, and subsequent perspiration, behind Gazooba, a "recommendation network" that allows visitors to earn points for passing on the good word about Web sites to their friends and relatives.

D.M. Osborne is our newest senior writer. There's a story behind her journey to *Inc.* as well. Not to make her life sound like a Jim Harrison novella, but she struck out for New York City when she was 16, desperate to get out of the one-stoplight southern town where she grew up. She danced a bit (at the Joffrey Ballet School) and put herself through college (at Hunter College). After a stint as a paralegal at the law firm of Fried, Frank during the deal boom of the 1980s, she attended Columbia University's Graduate School of Journalism and eventually joined Steven Brill's *The American Lawyer*. Later she followed Brill to his new magazine, *Brill's Content*, from which we snagged her. She begins her new role with her first feature, about the hot Internet launch Guru.com, a company seeking to make itself the premier destination for soloists.



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